

- Breaking News: One injured in Grover Beach crash
- Breaking News: CHP: Accident at Hwy. 154 and Hwy. 246 was fatal

[Home](#) / [News](#) / [Local](#) / [Education](#)

Guadalupe losing adult school and independent studies site

- [Story](#)
- [Discussion](#)

By Brian Bullock/Staff Writer bbullock@santamariatimes.com | Posted: Wednesday, June 2, 2010 12:45 am | (2) Comments

Font Size:

[Default font size](#)

[Larger font size](#)



[Buy this photo](#) Teacher Nancy Gaeta, left, student Reonna Ashley, 14, middle, and Ashley's sister, Raychell Dancliff, 19, right, talk about the closing of Guadalupe's adult and continuing education program. The program is a victim of the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District's budget issues. //Mark Brown/Staff

Reonna Ashley is just 14 years old, but her days in school might be numbered because the independent study program she utilizes in Guadalupe is closing.

She is one of about 50 students who use the independent study and adult education programs — located in the Guadalupe city offices — who will either have to travel to Santa Maria for the next school year or quit.

The Santa Maria Joint Union High School District is closing both remote locations – Guadalupe and an off-campus site near Santa Maria High – because of state budget cuts.

Despite her improving grades and enjoyment of working in the program, Reonna said she would rather quit school than continue her education on a high school campus.

“I don't want to go to regular school because I always have people saying they're going to jump me,” Reonna said.

She's heard those threats ever since an older sister became loosely associated with some Santa Maria gang members. To insulate her family from such threats, Reonna's mother, Leann, moved the family to Guadalupe, where Reonna found solace in the independent study program.

Along with the academic challenges Reonna has overcome, she has recently faced serious health issues that have kept her out of regular classrooms.

“She wants to drop out,” Leann said. “Last time she went (to a school campus), she wasn't there two days and had girls wanting to jump her. That's scary for me. If she's ditching school, I don't know where she's going.”

Lynette Wyller, Nancy Gaeta, Joel Punches and Allison Youngman all teach at the Guadalupe site, a single classroom in the Guadalupe city building, which ironically is the location of the old Guadalupe School. The sparsely equipped room serves both school-aged children and local adults, who are trying to get their high school diplomas.

Barring any restructure of the district's cash-strapped personnel budget, all four will be out of work when school ends in June. All four teachers are part-time employees on annual contracts.

The district is moving independent-study programs onto high school campuses to save money. Adult education is being eliminated because the state money funding the program is gone.

Gaeta said she understands the school district's decision to streamline the independent-study program, but said closing the Guadalupe site will be a loss for the city. She thinks about 80 percent to 90 percent of her independent-study students probably will not stay with the program when it moves into Santa Maria.

Access to the program is one of the key issues, Gaeta said. The current program is open during normal daytime school hours – roughly

8 a.m. to 3 p.m. When the program moves onto the main school campuses, independent study will only be available after school dismisses after 3:30 p.m. The district only operates buses to Guadalupe that pick up in the morning and drop off in the afternoon.

"There's no way for them to get there," Gaeta said.

Many of the students, like Reonna, are in an alternative education program to avoid school campuses. Others, like Justin Penrod, live and work in Guadalupe and use independent studies to finish high school while they are working full-time.

Justin, who played varsity baseball at Righetti High, is a senior and won't have to deal with the new system. He is using the Guadalupe classroom to get his diploma this year, while working at an adult care facility.

The Ashleys moved to Guadalupe in April 2009. Since then, Gaeta has provided Reonna some stability in her studies.

"We had a struggle at first finding what her learning style was," Gaeta explained

"Regular schools are set up for gray mares who all run in a pack and learn the same way. Our kids are golden palominos and wild stallions," she said describing her students as both unique and challenging. "We need both. We wouldn't have the world we live in without both."

Leann said her daughter has overcome learning challenges and is dealing with a mysterious heart ailment that will make it difficult for her to continue in the independent-study program when it moves to Santa Maria.

She also said it's frustrating that the district is closing the Guadalupe classroom, because she has finally found an educational program that is working for her daughter.

"There's no way to describe the feeling that you get when your kid brings home A's and B's when you're used to seeing D's and F's," Leann said. "It's satisfying to know that my kid's being taken care of and is learning something."

Gaeta said the independent-study students are just half the story in the Guadalupe classroom. She said many farm workers and their children utilize the location to complete their high school education.

Working teens and parenting minors use the Guadalupe classroom, Gaeta said, praising them for their effort and desire to get an education.

"This town is filled with hard-working people," she said. "The parents' work ethic carries down to their children. This group will now not be serviced."

Guadalupe City Administrator Regan Candelario agreed with Gaeta that his city's loss is difficult to take, but said it is a reflection of the fiscal woes of the entire state.

"It's unfortunate the state is in such a poor financial position these days that it's trickling down to the local level like this," said Candelario.

District Superintendent Doug Kimberly said he is sympathetic to all students who are being disrupted by a reduction in educational programs. The district is in its second year of severe state funding cuts, and is trying to trim approximately \$4 million from its 2010-11 budget.

Funding for adult education was eliminated by the state during the 2008-09 school year, Kimberly said. The state, trying to

provide its public school districts base funding, took money ear-marked for many specific programs such as adult education and swept it into a fund to provide base education funding.

The Santa Maria high school district board of education decided to pay for the adult education program this year on money it had remaining from the previous year.

Prior to the state funding cuts, the district received approximately \$600,000 per year for adult education, Kimberly said. Now, the district receives nothing, and that's why it's consolidating programs onto the school campuses, Kimberly said.

"It will be tough. What I'm really hoping is there are more opportunities online to help the adults than ever before," he said. "It's a difficult situation, but the primary focus of our district has to be looking at (ninth through 12th grades) to get through these tough economic times. This is an unprecedented economic situation."

Gaeta said she appreciates the district's efforts to cut costs and restructure its educational offerings.

"Their hands are tied. If there is no money, there is no money. But it's such a disservice to this community," Gaeta said. "To have this program go is a loss for Guadalupe."

Posted in Education on *Wednesday, June 2, 2010 12:45 am* Updated: 11:49 pm. | Tags:

[Share This Story](#)

[Print Email ShareThis](#)

Similar Stories

- Be kind to animals? This girl lives by that creed
- Local team shines at DI global finals
- Knights show true colors
- English learners overcome obstacles
- SJHS grad caps family legacy
- Link Crew hosts fourth AGHS regatta
- New law enforcement 'knights' take oath to protect

Sponsored Links